

NYC Elected Officials: Evidence of PCB Contamination in City Schools is Overwhelming; Mayor Must Initiate Immediate Plan of Action

Friday, 18 February 2011

NEW YORK, N.Y. - Today, Congressman Jerrold Nadler, Congressman José Serrano, Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal, State Senator Thomas Duane, and Borough President Scott Stringer reiterated the urgent need for the City of New York to immediately address the mounting PCB crisis in New York City's schools. With dozens of schools in the five boroughs now showing alarmingly elevated levels of PCB contamination - far in excess of PCB guidelines issued by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - the officials sent a letter to Mayor Bloomberg today demanding a quick and comprehensive plan for remediation of light fixtures and other materials known to be affected.

The following is the text of the letter:

February 18, 2011

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

As elected officials representing New York City, we are writing once again to urge your administration to develop a comprehensive remediation plan to address PCB contamination within light fixtures in the City's schools. We are calling on the City to devise an immediate plan in response to the continued exposure of children, teachers and school staff to PCBs, and to take concrete and earnest steps to carry it out without further delay.

As you know, evidence of PCB contamination in schools is mounting rapidly. Since January 2011, the EPA has begun to conduct regular inspections of schools around the city. The vast majority of the classrooms tested by the EPA have shown levels of PCB contamination dramatically in excess of EPA-recommended exposure levels for children. Additionally, concerned parents themselves have begun testing in schools in efforts to get answers about whether their children face exposure in their own classrooms. The test results released by the parents have also shown alarming levels of PCBs, far above the EPA's recommended guidelines.

To address this serious public health risk, the City must develop and carry out a comprehensive inspection and remediation plan that recognizes the urgency of the problem. We believe that all affected light ballasts can and must be replaced in the next 2-5 years in order to minimize the public health risk. Continued exposure to PCBs poses serious health risks to the children, teachers and staff who are at risk right now in our school buildings, and we must immediately eliminate the worst sources of the toxins, beginning with the contaminated light fixtures.

It is also our understanding that the light ballasts in question will become obsolete by 2012 as a result of a ban on their manufacture and sale by the U.S. Department of Energy. The fast-approaching obsolescence of the lights underscores the need to act quickly, because the City will be unable to replace or repair those lights with new parts once they become obsolete. We strongly encourage you to effectuate a remediation plan before the lights become obsolete.

The City's plan must be developed and finalized in consultation with the EPA so that the scope of the remediation and the protocols contained in the plan are shaped by the EPA's nation-wide perspective and expertise on this issue. As you know, the EPA issued guidelines in December 2010 regarding PCB-contaminated light ballasts. We have called on the EPA to participate in these conversations with your administration and to take an active role in helping to develop a light ballast inspection and remediation plan that is consistent with their recently issued guidelines.

The City must also move forward without delay on determining an actual cost for the remediation and seeking funding sources to replace the light fixtures. It is our understanding that the \$1 billion cost cited by your administration in recent correspondences has been disputed by the EPA, and the EPA has identified potential funding sources for the City. In order to determine the true cost of inspecting and replacing the light ballasts, and to move forward on funding this critical public health need, the City must issue a call for proposals and begin to examine potential funding streams immediately.

Finally, we ask the City to continue to engage in conversation with worried parents, educators and school staff around the city. As new evidence of PCB contamination appears in schools across the five boroughs virtually every week, the City must address the concerns of parents and staff with action to remedy the problem and by regularly sharing the information obtained through testing and remediation.

We are pleased that the City has acknowledged that PCB contamination is a problem in our public schools and we understand that the New York City Department of Education has directed maintenance staff to conduct visual inspections of light ballasts. However, we are concerned that these inspections do not ultimately provide adequate information about the levels of PCB contamination in the classrooms. cursory visual inspections simply are not enough to protect children and staff from PCB exposure.

In order to discuss this issue further, we are also requesting a meeting with your office. Thank you and we look forward to continuing this conversation.

Sincerely,

Congressman Jerrold Nadler

Congressman José Serrano

Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal

State Senator Thomas Duane

Borough President Scott Stringer

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